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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 003289

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF AND AF/E
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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ETHIOPIA TAKING TIME TO CONSIDER NEXT STEPS

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 3240 (AND PREVIOUS)
¶B. ADDIS ABABA 2910

Classified By: POL-ECON COUNSELOR KEVIN SULLIVAN. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. Ethiopia welcomed the UN Security Council's authorization of an IGAD/AU mission for Somalia, but did not foresee deployment until January 2007 or later, due to uncertainty relating to funding and troop contributing countries, according to Ethiopian MFA Somalia expert Fiseha Shawel. Fiseha considered it unlikely that representatives of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and the Council of Islamic Courts/Islamic Courts Union (ICU) would engage in negotiations on December 15, but suggested that talks could succeed with stronger U.S. engagement. Ethiopia assessed that Somali opposition to the ICU was growing, due partly to restrictions on cigarettes, liquor, and khat. Eritrea sought to convene an IGAD ministerial to highlight differences among IGAD members; Eritrea was also reinforcing troops supporting the ICU north of Mogadishu, and could reportedly mobilize 30,000 militia. While asserting there was no detailed plan, Fiseha said Ethiopian engagement of the ICU, if it were to occur, would be "swift and massive, and from all directions." Militarily, Ethiopia's overall strategy would be to "downsize" the ICU, in order to provide "breathing space" to the TFG, then allow TFG militia to replace Ethiopian troops. PM Meles would nevertheless "take time" to consider next steps. Politically, Fiseha highlighted the need for the TFG to accommodate the Ayr subclan, the "backbone" of the ICU. According to Fiseha, ex-TFG MP Yusuf Mire Serar was among the strongest of Ayr leaders, and while allied with the ICU, could be turned as he had no fixed allegiance. In contrast, former TNG president Abdiqassun Salad Hassan was personally corrupt, having amassed nearly USD 30 million from illegal activities, and was sympathetic to radical Islamicists; Abdullahi Ahmed Addow, a member of the Saad subclan, had little political base within Somalia, but due to his diplomatic experience, could help the TFG enhance relations with countries such as Syria and Egypt. Fiseha acknowledged that Ethiopia was enhancing security cooperation with Somaliland, and had agreed to provide fuel and foodstuffs to the TFG. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) In a December 12 meeting with pol-econ counselor and deputy, MFA Somalia desk officer Senior Second Secretary Fiseha Shawel reviewed recent developments since the December

6 adoption of UNSCR 1725, authorizing IGAD and the African Union to establish a protection and training mission in Somalia (IGASOM). Fiseha hailed the adoption of UNSCR 1725, but noted it was long overdue. Citing uncertainty regarding funding and potential troop contributing countries, Fiseha did not anticipate IGASOM deployment until January 2007 or later. Funding, not commitment, was the principal challenge, Fiseha said, predicting that Uganda was awaiting a more stable military situation prior to deploying troops. Both South African and Nigerian ambassadors had expressed support for IGASOM when invited to participate in IGAD-led discussions earlier this year, but had not elaborated on possible support for IGASOM since then. Eritrea was lobbying to convene a meeting of the IGAD Council of Ministers in Nairobi, he said, which was intended to erode the perception of unanimous support within IGAD for intervention in Somalia.

Such a meeting would pit Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya against Sudan, Eritrea, and Djibouti. He thought it unlikely that December 15 talks between the ICU and TFG would occur, but noted that with engagement by the United States, peace talks could succeed, as they had in Sudan.

CIC AND ERITREA COULD MUSTER 50,000 MILITIA

¶13. (C) According to Fiseha, Eritrea was "fully engaged" in seeking to provoke the ICU to launch war against Ethiopia, and was reinforcing troops north of Mogadishu. Citing the ICU's public ultimatum to Ethiopia to withdraw military forces within a week, he noted that the ICU's call for assistance from Muslims worldwide had resulted in an influx of jihadists. Eritrea's assessment, he said, was that strong

ADDIS ABAB 00003289 002 OF 004

opposition within Somalia to Ethiopia provided an opportunity to foster internal instability within Ethiopia itself. Eritrea could mobilize 30,000 militia; with the ICU, the total would be 50,000, he said. In contrast, Ethiopia's assessment was that popular opposition to the ICU within Somalia was growing: restrictions on cigarettes, liquor, and khat had particularly fostered resentment among business owners, many of whom were women, who constituted 55-60 per cent of areas under ICU control, Fiseha said.

MILITARY STRATEGY: SWIFTLY CUT OFF ICU'S SUPPLY ROUTES

¶14. (C) While asserting there was no detailed plan, Fiseha said Ethiopian engagement of the ICU, if it were to occur, would be "swift and massive, and from all directions." Militarily, Ethiopia's overall strategy would be to "downsize" the ICU, in order to provide "breathing space" to the TFG. Fiseha predicted "fierce" resistance from foreign Islamic "jihadists" supporting the ICU, who were assessed to be more committed than Somali fighters and less likely to surrender or retreat. An Ethiopian general, who had led the Ethiopian attack on the Gedo region of Somalia in 1996, recalled that while Somalis quickly retreated, al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) jihadists fought for days and often to the death. Asked whether ICU fighters would be difficult to engage if they did not concentrate in large numbers, Fiseha replied that current weather conditions (i.e., rain) and desert terrain led ICU fighters to concentrate along main roads and towns. As ICU supply routes stretched from the Indian Ocean to Mogadishu to Jowhar, concentrations of ICU fighters could not be supplied continuously; Ethiopia's strategy would be to cut them off from each other, and attack individual groups. Ethiopian forces could also engage the ICU from multiple directions: including from Galcaayo, Burhakaba/Baidoa, and Gedo. Well-trained, specially screened Somali fighters would then replace Ethiopia troops; "that is our exit strategy," Fiseha said.

¶ 15. (C) Pol-econ counselor noted that USG interlocutors had consistently underscored the need for dialogue and a negotiated solution. Fiseha responded that how to pressure the ICU remained the key challenge: the ICU was "remote-controlled," receiving support from Egypt, Syria, Libya, and Eritrea, who were not interested in dialogue. Fiseha observed that while the GOE "establishment" in the foreign and defense ministries, as well as the intelligence services, were urging strong Ethiopian action against the ICU, Prime Minister Meles would "take time" to consider next steps.

POLITICAL STRATEGY: POWER-SHARING FOR AYR SUB-CLAN

¶ 16. (C) Fiseha highlighted the need for the TFG to accommodate the Ayr subclan of the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir: the Ayr of ICU leaders such as Sheikh Sharif Ahmed and Adan Hashi Ayro, not all Hawiye, provided the principal support for the ICU. "The backbone of the ICU is Ayr," he noted. Other Hawiye subclans were either disinterested in the ICU (e.g., the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Saad subclan) or supported the TFG. Members of the Hawiye/Abgaal subclan largely resented being controlled by the Ayr and thus were dissatisfied with the ICU, Fiseha asserted. Fiseha provided the following comments on possible Hawiye leaders whom the TFG could incorporate into broader power-sharing:

Abdiqassun Salad Hassan: Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr, but he would "not be helpful" due to personal corruption and sympathy to "Islamicists".

-- According to Fiseha, during the three-and-a-half-years of his presidency of the TNG (vice TFG), Hassan amassed a personal fortune of USD 20-30 million, embezzling contributions from Arab states. When the Government of Sudan provided a delegation led by Hassan with commodities and a

ADDIS ABAB 00003289 003 OF 004

USD 1 million cash contribution, he reportedly kept the cash and provided other delegation members with USD 5,000. Hassan was close to Djibouti and involved in illegal business activities, Fiseha added.

-- Hassan's "al Islah" organization, while considered relatively moderate, may share the extremist views of the ICU. Fiseha noted that Hassan's close ties to Islamicists had prompted Siad Barre to keep Hassan under "intense surveillance."

-- Fiseha assessed that Hassan was a poor politician and not a committed leader: garnering only 20-30 votes in October 2004 TFG presidential elections, compared to 189 received by Abdullahi Yusuf.

Abdullahi Ahmed Addow: Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Saad, so he would not appeal to Ayr, but would be an effective representative to the international community, drawing on his experience as Siad Barre's ambassador to the U.S. in the 1980s.

-- Fiseha noted that Addow was considered a member of the Diaspora, based in Dubai, Nairobi, or the United States, and had no following on the ground. On the other hand, he could play an effective role in a diplomatic posting, enhancing the TFG's ties with countries such as Egypt and Syria.

-- Stronger political skills than Hassan: received 79 votes in October 2004 as runner-up to Abdullahi Yusuf.

Yusuf Mire Serar: Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr; currently allied with the ICU, but assessed as having no fixed allegiance.

-- Fiseha reported that Serar was an MP who had abandoned the TFG, and now controlled the area from Mogadishu to Kismayo for the ICU. Among Ayr, Serar was one of the strongest leaders, Fiseha said, although he was not well educated, chain smoked, and chewed khat.

-- Serar derived significant income from charcoal, livestock,

and khat, as well as from roadblocks and taxes.

-- Fiseha noted that Abdiqassim Salad Hassan had personally insisted on the inclusion of Serar, when Serar did not appear on the original list of MPs discussed at the TFG's formation in Nairobi.

¶7. (C) Political divisions between Hawiye and Darod clan members of the TFG, also needed to be addressed, Fiseha said.

While currently dominated by the Darod of President Abdullahi Yusuf, the TFG was willing to cede leadership to the Hawiye in 2008 or 2009, but no consensus existed among Hawiye leadership. Experience showed that Hawiye/Habr-Gedir subclan members preferred instability, Fiseha said. It was thus necessary to hand-pick Hawiye ministers to serve under President Yusuf.

¶8. (C) Fiseha highlighted the political vulnerability of both TFG Prime Minister Ali Mohammed Ghedi (a Hawiye) and TFG Parliamentary speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, should negotiations occur on restructuring the TFG. Speaker Adan had miscalculated by switching allegiance to the ICU for the last two months; as he had previously been allied with the warlords prior to the TFG, the Speaker was seen as an opportunist whose allegiance had been purchased by Hawiye, Fiseha said. Fiseha noted that the TFG Minister of Trade, a Hawiye, had proposed holding a conference of traditional Hawiye elders in Addis Ababa, to underscore that the Hawiye did not uniformly support the ICU. While traditional elders had long played an important role in Somali political culture, Fiseha noted that Siad Barre had simply selected new elders to suit his ambitions.

ETHIOPIA ENHANCES SECURITY COOPERATION WITH SOMALILAND

¶9. (C) Fiseha reported that while the ICU threat to Somaliland was not yet imminent, Somaliland had in the previous week arrested ICU organizers for the first time, after warning them not to continue seditious activities. Fiseha noted that AIAI founder and ICU leader Sheikh Ali Warsame was an Isaaq from Somaliland, and also brother-in-law to ICU leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. Warsame was intensifying anti-government activities in Somaliland, Fiseha said, organizing pro-ICU demonstrations as well as ICU cells.

¶10. (C) Fiseha confirmed recent state-run media reports that

ADDIS ABAB 00003289 004 OF 004

Ethiopia was strengthening cooperation with Somaliland to enhance border security, following December 12 talks between GOE Federal Affairs Minister Siraj Fegessa and a delegation led by Somaliland Interior Affairs Minister Abdullahi Ismael Ali. Ethiopia and Somaliland engaged in intelligence-sharing, and cooperated to control activities of Ethiopian insurgents in the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF), Fiseha said. Ethiopia was providing small arms and uniforms to Somaliland security forces, he added. (NOTE: Somaliland Foreign Minister Abdillahi M. Dualle is currently visiting Addis Ababa, although his presence has not been publicly reported. Other Somaliland ministers participated in a World Bank seminar in Addis Ababa, which concluded December 12. END NOTE.)

¶11. (C) Ethiopia had also agreed to transport fuel and foodstuffs duty-free to the TFG via the Ethiopian border town of Dolo, Fiseha said, following a recent visit by the TFG Minister of Trade. The ICU was blocking supplies to the TFG, he said, whose only alternative had been to obtain them through Bosasso.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Fiseha's observations underscore Ethiopia's strategic concerns with relation to Somalia. While his remarks reflect that Ethiopia has developed a military strategy to weaken the ICU, they also suggest that Ethiopia may be considering other options. Fiseha's detailed analysis

of the TFG's need to accommodate Hawiye and Ayr subclans indicates that much can be done on the political front: to broaden the TFG's appeal and to gain support from moderates whose allegiance to the ICU is rooted more in expediency than Islamic jihadist ideology. END COMMENT.

WILGUS